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HIGH-SCHOOL JOURNALISM

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The display of school journalism, which formed a part of the recent "budget exhibit" in New York City, attracted much public interest. Sixty publications were shown, ranging from the elaborate yearbooks and monthlies of the high schools to the less ambitious mimeographed sheets of the lower schools. These were from public schools alone; to include journals published in the private schools of the city would more than double this number, and when one thinks of this flood of school journalism spreading the country over, one may well ask whether it justifies the vast expenditure of time and money. For the type of paper or yearbook maintained by a fairly ambitious school will cost all the way from five hundred to a thousand dollars yearly to produce, and such publications exist by hundreds, if not by thousands, throughout the country.

The purpose of this article is to make clear why, in the writer's opinion, this journalistic activity is a vital force for good, to show how it reacts on the editors and on the school, and how it can be helped by the friendly co-operation of some interested teacher.

After some years of experiment and observation, I am confident that school journalism affects in more important ways than at first appear both the editors and the school as a whole. The editors gain a medium for the expression of literary and artistic

talent and of opinion on school topics. They gain influence in the school, of a kind frequently monopolized by the athlete. They gain definite training in writing for a market, under the sharp criticism of their mates; and incidentally a good deal of technical knowledge of typography, pasting-up, proof-reading, and the like. They gain—what literary young folks are apt to need—the power to work in groups, instead of individually. They gain in responsibility, from the necessity of fulfilling regularly recurring obligations to subscribers and advertisers: business obligations, for which the ever-ready “excuse” is no substitute. And they experience from these opportunities and responsibilities the kind of appeal that we teachers find so difficult to put before the clever but self-satisfied pupil; an appeal to rise above the dead level of mediocrity. Mediocrity cannot run a good school paper; neither can lazy cleverness. A journal that is worth a “gentleman’s mark of C” is not worth a dollar a year. The realization of this blunt truth, through the effective discipline of his co-editors, has been the making of more than one boy who was content to slide through school on his wits. And for the school at large the paper does as much or more. It stimulates and vitalizes composition work; it distributes news; it keeps a permanent record not only of events, but of legislation, such as the charters of various societies; it stimulates the activity of these societies, by their anticipation of “what the paper will say”; it binds alumni to the school; and, if conducted with frankness and public spirit, it often reveals to the principal tendencies in student thought and opinion that are worth his consideration and may help to shape his policies.

To make the discussion of this belief definite and practical, let me outline the organization of the paper published by the Horace Mann High School; not that it is necessarily worthy of imitation, but that, being a growing organism, the outcome of eight years of experiment, it is illustrative of actual conditions, and not of mere theory. Other papers have a more complex system; for instance, I understand that one of the Indianapolis high schools issues a daily paper, printed by the pupils, and edited by a different board for each day of the week. Local

opportunities or interests will determine the plan to be followed; the following one will show most of the difficulties to be met, and many of the results to be hoped for.

The *Horace Mann Record* includes in one subscription price, and under one board of editors, two papers: a quarterly magazine, and a bi-weekly news bulletin. These were formerly, as in most schools, united in a single monthly; but under that arrangement the news got cold before it reached its public. The issue of a separate news sheet put new life into the paper; it became a live influence in the school, especially under the guidance of a teacher who was in close relations with one of the big city dailies. Meantime the literary section, issued quarterly, gained in size and dignity, as it could be prepared with more deliberate care in the selection of material. The vital connection between the two papers is maintained largely for financial reasons: a school, unless very large, will not easily support two papers, and the literary one, valuable as it is, would appeal to the smaller public and so go to the wall.

I have before me the first two issues, for the year, of the news bulletin. In form it is a four-page sheet, resembling the college dailies. It has twelve nine-inch columns, made up substantially in this proportion: (issue of October 12) athletics, $1\frac{1}{2}$ col.; graduation festivities, 1; faculty changes, 1; alumni, 2; school chat, 1; various news items, $3\frac{1}{2}$; editorials, $1\frac{1}{2}$; advertisements, $\frac{1}{2}$; (issue of October 26) athletics, 3; alumni, 1; school chat, 1; editorials, 2; advertisements, $\frac{3}{4}$; and the rest scattering. A little fuller inspection shows that advertisements are too scanty, but are coming up; that the accounts of games are intelligently written, analyzing the significant plays so that one who did not see the game can get a clear idea of the merits of the teams; that the two alumni lists contain 103 names, and cover 28 colleges and other institutions of learning, as well as the business world, marriages, and varia; that the news items cover a wide field: the report of the girls who went to the Silver Bay Conference, the organization of the Dramatic Club, the doings of the Elementary School, a discussion of the honor system, of the new athletic field, of the visit of some distinguished Japanese,

etc. The editorials are incisive without being pert: a plea—on ingenious grounds—for a holiday, an appeal to the students to assist officials in keeping order at games, a sharp attack on the lunch-room management, etc. A significant point is that a critic, even if inclined to be hostile, would find nothing to attack as silly or cheap or “yellow,” because the editors, even if disposed to use such matter, would find it crowded out by real live news.

The quarterly has not yet appeared; but I shall expect in it a corresponding range of interests on the literary and artistic side.

The organization of this journal is rather complex; indeed, a city editor of a big New York paper said, on looking over the names of the board, “It seems to take more people to get out your paper than to make a city daily.” This complexity, however, is not objectionable, as the benefit of editorial training can be the more widely extended.

The business management, being at the basis of everything, should be described first. The two business managers (with their assistant, who is qualifying for a full position next year) have two main problems: advertisements and subscriptions. They have to raise, say, six or eight hundred dollars; until they have this actually in sight, the editor-in-chief will not know how big a paper he can print, how many issues, or what illustrations he can have. Immediately on their appointment in the spring they must begin a canvass for subscriptions, especially in the outgoing Senior class. When school reopens, they must organize a corps of agents to solicit subscriptions and to deliver papers; they must devise a checking system, to make sure that each subscriber, especially each one on the mailing list, receives his copy. On the side of advertising, they must prepare rate-sheets and contract-blanks; interview all possible advertisers, approaching them with that well-bred persistency that will secure the contract—no small task, in view of the fact that school advertisements do not at best bring the advertiser very large returns; they must be sure, also, that the terms of the contract are strictly carried out, and in case of mistakes, must give the advertiser satisfaction. They must pay all authorized bills, carefully keeping vouchers.

They must keep accurate books, and be prepared at any time to report on the financial standing and outlook of the paper. If there is a surplus from preceding years, they must invest it wisely, and if possible add to it. Finally, they must for their own protection submit, before going out of office, all their accounts and vouchers to some authorized examination. Their task is no sinecure—neither is it without its reward. One former business manager recently told me, with conviction in his voice, "I owe my success in business to my experience on the *Record*."

The news bulletin is in charge of a "bulletin editor" and his (or her) staff: a Senior, a Junior, and an elementary news editor, reporters for their respective grades of the school; an athletic editor, and an alumni editor. The bulletin editor keeps (on a blackboard in the sanctum) a list of assignments to these reporters, each of whom is responsible for his assignment and as much more, within his field, as he can gather. Big "feature stories" the bulletin editor may himself cover; but his chief function is to make assignments, to edit the reports, to write, in collaboration with the editor-in-chief, the editorials, to paste up the dummy, write headlines, and read proof. Of his assistants, the athletic editor must be really athletic, understanding the games; his accounts must not be literary impressions of the various sports, but facts, detailed by an expert. If the choice for this position lay between a good athlete who could not write and a good writer who could not play ball, I should appoint the athlete, and let somebody rewrite his "stories." He or his deputies must cover every athletic event, not merely the crucial games of the first team. If there are girls' teams, some girl on the staff must cover them. Expenses to out-of-town games are usually paid by the paper.

The alumni editor has perhaps the hardest task of any, because the alumni will escape beyond his reach. Wide acquaintance, real interest, unremitting perseverance, and a conscience for the exact fact are needed, to build up a good column. Without these, no system will work. An editor among the alumni will be enthusiastic at first, but will be apt to cool; and the paper cannot keep in touch with him. The same is apt to be true of

corresponding editors in the several colleges. There must be an active editor in the school, who keeps a notebook constantly with him and lives only to learn about alumni—from themselves, from the teachers, the principal, the college or city press. Such a boy recently undertook to make a card-catalogue of all the alumni of the school, entering under each graduate's name whatever the *Record* had ever printed about him. This file, always accessible to interested persons, will in time come to be a most effective bond between the alumni and the school.

Turning to the literary quarterly, we are at once confronted with the problem of where to get stories. This is the problem of the literary editor, who is most likely to be a girl. She need not be the best writer in the school—particularly if the best writer is high-strung and supersensitive, separated by her artistic gift from the sympathy of her mates. Such a girl makes a poor critic, unduly severe in her standards, and will discourage writers whose line happens to be different from hers. It is better to have a girl of evenly developed capabilities, sound common sense, and a wide circle of acquaintance; it goes without saying that her common sense should be sufficiently uncommon to enable her to recognize an unusual bit of writing when she sees it. She will cultivate the able writers of all classes, discovering new authors when she can, coming back to the old faithfuls when she must—able, as a last resort, to fill in with a good story of her own. I tabulated once, for the board, the work of the preceding editors for five years back, and we agreed that the one who had done most for the paper, on the literary side, was a girl who had printed practically nothing of her own, but had discovered a large number of young writers, both girls and boys. It was not surprising that this girl, on entering college, was sought out for all sorts of editorial and executive positions. The hardest problem in this department is the occasional outbreak of plagiarism. We have once or twice had to deal with a writer, usually of some little literary talent and ambition, who took a short cut to fame by sending in a story stolen from some professional magazine. A new board of editors should be warned of this possibility, and be ready, if so imposed on, to mete out

to the aspirant for fame the kind of penalty that would be due to the same kind of dishonesty on the ball field.

The position of art editor is hard to fill; at the high-school age, artistic talent is largely untrained, often highly developed in a single direction, but skittish and unreliable. The best caricaturist in the school perhaps cannot draw a tolerable tail-piece; the girl who does the most charmingly balanced designs cannot make them interesting to her public. The artist may wait so long for inspiration that the paper goes to press unillustrated. But these same highly individualized people may be saved from future failure by the immediate necessity of harnessing their artistic temperament to serve a useful end. The caricaturist may have recourse to the art teacher, and the designer may get vitalizing contact with more lively folk, and both may learn to command their talent, rather than wait for it to command them.

The exchange column appears to be a fixture in school papers, and often an amusing one. The *Record* exchanges with sixty or seventy magazines, the reading of which, for editorial comment, develops not a little breadth of view and critical acumen. Occasionally a duel of wit will take place between rival papers; one of our more daring editors once even ventured to assail a dignified college monthly. There is danger, naturally, that the criticism will become verbose or "smart"; it is sure to, if the editor thinks too highly of his own wit. But a level-headed, bright boy or girl, not blinded by conceit or prejudice, can often learn much, and teach other editors much, through the exchange column. Some years ago our exchange editor conducted a lively discussion with an English schoolboy editor on the spirit and methods of school journalism here and in England. The English boy commented on the professionalism of American school papers; their attempt to compete with regular magazines in their fiction; the unblushing assurance that led our boys to be willing to print their names; and the superior hold the English paper had on its alumni. The American editor answered, defending our fiction as more vital, even if less learned, than the English "essays," and attributing the willingness of our boys to print their names to a

manly feeling of pride and responsibility. The English editor answered in his forthcoming number; and the American boy finally summarized the whole discussion, with an unbiased appreciation of the merits of both sides of the controversy that did credit both to his fairness and to his keenness of mind.

All these activities center in the editor-in-chief. He will have little to write, aside from the leading editorials; but much to do, in assigning duties to others, and in following them up: always ready to lend a hand, to appoint an assistant or a substitute, or to do whatever may be necessary to insure the appearance, on time, of a creditable paper. He represents the paper officially, in its relation with the school authorities; he makes arrangements with the printer; he decides all matters of executive detail; he is responsible for the prompt appearance of the paper, and for its contents; and he will call meetings, at stated intervals, to discuss the policy of the paper and to go critically over the numbers as issued. He should be able, popular, and reliable; a worthy leader. He should not be one of those milk-and-water boys who always do what they are told; one of the best editors we ever had was a silent, hard-headed Scot who opposed, at times, a will of iron to certain ideas of the advisory teacher. But his will was based on good judgment and high ideals so that in spite of occasional differences the teacher and the editor grew to have for each other a strong respect and loyal friendship, under which the paper thrived. A girl, as a rule, does not make a good editor-in-chief, in a co-educational school; she can with difficulty command an adequate following. Boys are sensitive about working under a girl, however great her ability; and they will not give her their hearty support.

These various editors may be selected by election, by competition, or by promotion. The retiring board should by one or all of these methods appoint their successors, and then break them in by having them make the last number of the paper, under direction. All three methods of choice are open to objection; my own decision would be in favor of election of the chief, whose personal qualities count for so much, and appointment of

the others through promotion of the most efficient, subject to open competition from other candidates. Every effort should be made to guard against favoritism, particularly "fraternity pull"; when this creeps in, it means the office is being sought as a trophy, not as an opportunity, and the result will be disaster. To guard against this, there should be a rule of the board that a sufficiently large majority can demand the resignation of any member, even the chief, on grounds of inefficiency or neglect.

From the regular activities of an enterprising board will spring new ones to meet changing conditions from year to year. I have spoken of the card catalogue run by the alumni editor. Other editors may start the useful habit of posting daily news bulletins; may make, and sell in the name of the paper, photographs of school teams or dramatic casts; or may open the sanctum for the sale of tickets to games or other entertainments. After the lapse of ten years or more, it will be quite possible to reprint, from the school paper, books of short stories or of school verse or illustrations. In co-operation with class secretaries, the paper might issue special news sheets for the quinquennial reunions of classes. One feature of our organization, a club of all present and past editors, has grown from a very informal candy-pull in a private home, to a considerable supper given annually by the board to all of their predecessors who can be reached. They come back, sometimes twenty or more, from the business world, from college, at considerable inconvenience, and give the younger editors their friendship, their advice, and best of all, the stimulus of their success; for these graduates have gone on and become college or, in some cases, professional editors; college debaters; officers of their classes; artists of promise—successful young men and women in many walks of life. Their annual return means much to the students; it means much to the teachers who were associated with them in their early attempts to make a good school paper.

And what of the teacher adviser? The complexity of a highly original paper demands, in the first place, the services of some one person permanent for a term of at least three years,

who will be a conservator of such practices as have been found wise. The office should not be retained too long; the paper needs the vivifying influence of new blood, and other teachers have something to gain by experience on the paper. The man or woman (preferably, each in turn) who takes this office should be the helpful friend, resourceful, ready with advice when wanted, familiar with the paper's past and ambitious for its future. Two things he should not be: one is a censor, the other is an editor-in-chief. Censorship is rarely, if ever, necessary. The kind of objectionable matter occasionally written for a school paper grows out of momentary thoughtlessness or a bit of unconsidered humor, and is set right at once by a tactful suggestion. But the tacit, though unacknowledged, assumption of editorial powers is a real temptation to an interested teacher; he will grow to love the paper and to want to be an increasingly strong force in determining its policy. Nothing could be more surely fatal; the student body are quick to detect the voice of Jacob, no matter if the hairy hand of Esau signs the editorial. They are even ready to imagine dictation from a teacher where it does not exist. And the moment they think that discussion in the columns of their paper is not free, the paper loses their respect, and is no longer a power in the school. The teacher adviser should tell his editors *how*, and not *what*, to write. If he is the right sort, and is on terms of friendly familiarity with his board, his influence will permeate the board so that they will work for whatever is their conception of the best interests of the paper and the school. If in the pursuit of these ideals they go in some direction that seems to the teacher unwise, he must firmly refrain from interfering: only by freedom can they become strong; only by their mistakes can they learn the right; and from my own experience, I surmise the teacher may have something to learn, too.